

Workforce Issues and Adult Literacy: Fact Sheet

National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

July 26, 2001

- The strong economy and the abundant resources currently available through the federal block grant Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work grants, and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provide a good environment in which to test innovative mechanisms for sustaining and improving employment. The challenge for states is to help low-income families stay in the workforce and gain access to better jobs over time.¹
- The final rules for TANF expand the ability of states to use federal funds to aid working low-income families, and WIA offers opportunities to help serve low-income people after they become employed.²
- The 1998 WIA places a strong emphasis on serving all workers, not just the unemployed, and it encourages states and localities to provide job retention and job advancement help to individuals in the workplace.³
- The research shows that the most successful programs have been found to provide mixed strategies of employment and skill building services. Mixed strategy quick-employment programs that offer a full range of employment and training services have generally had larger and longer-lasting impacts, and been more likely to help the most disadvantaged recipients than job search only programs.⁴
- Higher basic skills and especially education beyond high school are linked to higher wages later on.⁵ Low basic skills stand out among a range of personal barriers to employment. It is by far the most common barrier and the one most connected to not working.⁶ Further, low basic skills are a chronic problem for many of those in poverty and receiving welfare. Their low skills, in turn, typically bar them from obtaining occupational credentials.⁷
- The 2002 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) will collect extensive data on the employment, earnings, occupations, and job experiences of American adults, as well as the number of weeks they worked and the number of employers they worked for during the previous year. NAAL will also collect information on adults' participation in job-related

¹ Strawn, J. and Martinson, K. (2000). *Steady work and better jobs: How to help low-income parents sustain employment and advance in the workforce*. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. Available at <http://www.mdrc.org/Reports2000/SteadyWorkGuide.pdf>

² Strawn and Martinson (2000).

³ Strawn and Martinson (2000).

⁴ Strawn and Martinson (2000).

⁵ Cancian and Meyer (1997). Cited in Strawn and Martinson (2000)

⁶ Strawn, J. (1998). *Beyond job search or basic education: Rethinking the role of skills in welfare reform*. Executive Summary. Washington, D.C.: Center for Law and Social Policy. Available at <http://www.clasp.org/pubs/jobseducation/beyond.pdf>

⁷ Berlin and Sum, 1988; Levy and Murnane, 1992; Venezky, Kaestle, and Sum, 1987. Cited in Strawn and Martinson (2000).

training during the past year and their perceived need for job-related literacy and computer skills.

- NAAL data may be analyzed to inform a number of policy issues related to workforce investment—such as the relationships between literacy skills, occupations, employment, and job tenure. In addition, NAAL data can increase knowledge about the workforce experiences and needs of key population subgroups—such as adults with various levels education, linguistic minorities, and low literate adults.
- A high school diploma or the equivalent is often an entry requirement to postsecondary institutions offering education and training that can lead to better jobs and higher wages. The 2002 NAAL includes specific background questions to identify adults who have earned the General Educational Development (GED) credential, regardless of their subsequent levels of education or training. This information, new in 2002, will enable researchers to study factors relating to the further education and training, literacy skills, employment, occupations, and earnings of this segment of the adult population.

Helpful Web Sites

U.S. Department of Education Employment and Training Administration

Gateway to Information on the Workforce Investment Act

<http://www.usworkforce.org/>

WIA Questions and Answers

<http://www.usworkforce.org/asp/qanda.asp>

Map of State One-Stop Web Sites

<http://www.usworkforce.org/onestop/onestopmap.html>

Adult Programs

<http://www.doleta.gov/programs/adtrain.asp>

Center for Law and Social Policy

<http://www.clasp.org/>

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

<http://www.mdrc.org/WorkingPoor.htm>